

No Child Left Behind

Standards and Assessment

Action Guide for Parents and Communities

PUBLIC
EDUCATION
NETWORK

Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

State Content and Academic Achievement Standards

The NCLB state accountability system is based on the development of state content and academic achievement standards which are measured by state assessments and compared to the “adequate yearly progress” expectations. Each state is allowed to develop their own standards, assessments and AYP expectations, with review by the US Department of Education.

State Content and Academic Achievement Standards in Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics and Science

Every state receiving NCLB funding must develop both content and academic achievement standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science that must be aligned with assessments in the same subject areas for grades 3-8 and high school:

- Content Standards specify what all students are expected to know and the information that should be covered in the three subject areas and grade levels.
- Academic Achievement Standards describe how well the students are acquiring the information and skills as defined by the content standards and measured by the state assessment test(s).
- Cut scores are a major element of the Academic Achievement Standards. They separate one level of achievement from another and are arbitrarily determined by the state. NCLB requires two levels of “high” achievement: proficient and advanced, and a third “lower” level of achievement: basic. States have the flexibility to give different names to these levels. For example, Maine’s achievement levels are called: exceeds standards, meets standards, and partially meets standards. States also have the flexibility to have more than three levels such as Louisiana, which has five levels: advanced, proficient, basic, approaching basic, and unsatisfactory.
- All students are expected to achieve at the proficient level under NCLB requirements (see AYP Action Brief).

Did You Know?

- Every state that receives funding from NCLB must develop both content and achievement standards, and those standards must apply to EVERY public school student in the state.
- Your state education department must consult with a broad-base of community stakeholders including, but not limited to, parents, teachers, principals, and other local school district personnel when developing its standards.
- Most states have met the requirements for developing educational standards, but many have not completed work on the assessment system required by NCLB to be in place by the beginning of the school year 2005-2006.
- NCLB does NOT require the state to adopt an assessment system based on a single test administered once per year, but does allow the State to employ a combination of State and local assessments, as long as they are aligned with the state content and academic achievement standards, and allow for valid comparisons between school districts and schools.

Academic Assessments

As the States develop content and academic achievement standards, they are then required to develop new assessments, or adjust their current assessments, to assure that they are aligned with the standards and include all public school students in the state. Assessments must be conducted annually and at least:

- Test reading/language arts and mathematics for all public school students in grades 3 through 8;
- Test in reading/language arts and math once in grades 10 through 12; and
- Test in science at least once in grades 3 through 5, once in grades 6 through 9, and once in grades 10 through 12.

NCLB Required Assessments by Subject and Grade Level

NCLB requires that the design of a State's assessment:

Grade Level	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight	Nine	Ten	Eleven	Twelve
Reading/Language Arts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Once in this Grade Span		
Mathematics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Once in this Grade Span		
Science	Once in this Grade Span			Once in this Grade Span				Once in this Grade Span		

- Be the same assessment system used to measure the achievement of all public school students in the state;
- Provide coherent information about student attainment of state standards across grades and subjects;
- Be valid and accessible for all students, including students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency (LEP);
- Be valid, reliable and of adequate technical quality;
- Involve multiple, up-to-date measures of student achievement, including measures that assess higher-order thinking skills and understanding of challenging content;
- Objectively measure academic achievement, knowledge, and skills without evaluating or assessing family beliefs and attitudes;
- Produce individual student reports;
- Enable itemized score analyses;
- Enable results to be disaggregated (separated into sub-groups) within each State, school district and school by gender, each major ethnic and racial group, migrant status, students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency (LEP), and economically disadvantaged students; and
- Allow states to use an off-the-shelf criterion referenced test, a norm-referenced tests, or an augmented test which includes test items from both, as long as the assessment is aligned with the standards.

Action Opportunities for Community Leaders

The development of state education standards and assessments is critical to the success of standards-based reform, but has been created in many cases without the involvement or knowledge of the community or parents. If standards-based reform is to increase student achievement, it is essential that the community and parents are informed about the standards, know what students should be expected to know and do academically, understand the testing system, provide the support necessary for all students to succeed, and hold policy makers accountable for providing the resources and tools necessary for all students to meet state expectations.

Major strategic opportunities are provided in this section for community-based organizations and parent leaders to engage in discussions, town meetings and conversations about the most effective ways of holding public schools accountable.

- Be informed about your state content and achievement standards, and work with parents to educate the community about state expectations for all students. Many community members have never seen the state standards or know that they exist. Publicize the standards widely, and break them down into a language that the community members are able to understand. Community organizations can play a role in helping to inform hard to reach parents and other members of the community through the newspaper, faith-based strategies, school meetings and discussions held at the library, and onsite at many of the leading employers in the area.
- Even though many states have already approved the state standards, the community should work with parents and the school district to recommend changes, additions, edits, or deletions to state officials. For instance, are the standards rigorous and challenging? Did the state custom-design their assessments to closely align with the standards, or did they buy an off the shelf test? Did the state set a cut score that was low, realistic or unattainable? Does the state use a norm-referenced test (which is used to compare students against other students) or a criterion referenced tests (which compares students against a set of expected outcomes)? The more community and parental awareness and involvement generated about the standards, the greater the understanding and ownership in the accountability system thereby increasing community and parental support.
- Host meetings to discuss the impact that the standards will have on your community and on the public schools. What resources, special services, instructional materials, school staff and/or extended time does a school need to meet the standards. What community commitments will be required to assist schools in meeting the standards? Can the community provide classroom volunteers, before and after school services, summer school assistance, or preschool help?
- Community-based organizations should work with parents to host meetings and other events to learn about the appropriate use of assessments and determine if the test is a quality instrument and well researched.
- Some things that are important to understand include:
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment?
 - How to guard against misusing the assessment?
 - What are the differences between the various testing models such as criterion reference, standardized tests, and achievement tests?

- What happens when the various test outcomes contradict each other?
- What are basic technical elements of an assessment such as reliability and validity, and how do I know if the assessment really does a good job of measuring what my child knows?
- Does the school use a single test to make academic judgments about students such as grade promotion, retention, or graduation, or does the district take into consideration other relevant student information as well such as report card grades, student exhibits, writing samples and a teacher's day-to-day evaluation?
- Listen to teachers and their reactions to state assessments. Do teachers feel they are forced to teach to the test, and that there is a heavy emphasis on test scores? Do teachers see assessments as a tool for improvement, or as a punitive strategy that serves to place blame on teachers, students, parents or the principal? Are the assessments helping to improve the curriculum, or narrow the scope of the curriculum? Do you feel teachers are prepared to implement the standards, or do they require additional professional development and help? Do teachers understand the pros and cons of assessment, and can they communicate information to the parents? Do the teachers know how to use the assessments to impact increase student achievement?
- Create a community assessment team comprised of, among others, community members, parents, testing experts, and higher education to monitor the impact of testing on students, and to assure the appropriate use of tests. Study the impact of testing on students, teachers and parents. Assure that parents understand the technicalities of the testing system, and serve as a proxy for those parents who need additional information or help.
- Be proactive. BEFORE the assessment results are announced, get in front of the assessments by encouraging community discussions about the kinds of resources and the quality of education each school must have in place to meet the standards. Conduct an audit and analyses of the school district's ability to meet state expectations based on such indicators as past student assessments; socio-economics status; the levels of parental involvement; quality and competency of teachers; special student needs such as health and social service support, instructional interventions such as preschool programs, before and after school offerings, tutorials, and expanded school day and school year opportunities.
- Educate your community about the limitations of using test scores alone to determine the success of individual schools or the school districts. While test scores can be used as "signals" of how schools are measuring up to meeting the standards, test scores have limitations as indicators of school success, and should never be used as the sole determinant of achievement (See Action Brief on AYP).
- Work with your community, parents and school districts in developing additional indicators of school academic success beyond the state assessment. For secondary schools, graduation rates MUST be selected as an additional indicator, while school districts must select at least one other indicator for elementary schools, but that can be of their choosing. Many elementary schools are using student attendance as their second indicators. Other indicators could be: socio-economic status of students, per capita student spending, levels of parent involvement, class size, school safety data, and/or other assessments such as achievement tests and teacher-made assessments.

Action Opportunities for Parent Leaders

The development of state education standards and assessments is critical to the success of standards-based reform, but has been created in many cases without the involvement or knowledge of the community or parents. If standards-based reform is to increase student achievement, it is essential that the community and parents are informed about the standards, know what students should be expected to know and do academically, understand the testing system, provide the support necessary for all students to succeed, and hold policy makers accountable for providing the resources and tools necessary for all students to meet state expectations.

Major strategic opportunities are provided in this section for community-based organizations and parent leaders to engage in discussions, town meetings and conversations about the most effective ways of holding public schools accountable.

- Either work with your school district or work independently to provide parents information about your state standards. Parents and students should be informed about state expectations, what students will be required to know and be tested on, what the consequences for not passing the assessments and what the community and parents can do to support the instructional program and the state's academic expectations.
- Discuss with parents the school district's responsibility for informing them about how the state standards relate to the school curriculum, teacher qualifications, state assessments and AYP status (See Action Brief on AYP). Conduct meetings with parents to discuss the district and school's assessment program, when tests are administered, and the consequences if students do not meet state expectations. Parents should know that test scores only provide a limited picture of what each child is learning, and that additional information should be received through report cards, parent teacher conferences, and through notes home. This information should be in a language and a format that parents can understand.
- Prepare parents in asking questions: how does the material my child learns in class relate to the test? In what other ways does the school measure how well my child is doing? What tests are my child expected to take beyond the state assessment test and what do they mean? How does the teacher and my child's school use test results to improve instruction? How should a parent interpret different results from the various different tests that a school district may administer beyond the state-required test?
- At the community level, develop with community leaders a community assessment team to oversee the impact of testing on students at the district level, and to assure the appropriate use of tests. Assure that the state assessments are aligned with the curriculum, and study the impact of testing on students, teachers and parents. At the school level, take the lead in creating a similar committee of parent, teachers and community members. This committee will assure that parents understand the technicalities of the testing system, and serve as a proxy for those parents who need additional information or help, monitor the impact of the assessment system on students and teachers, determine how much time as school spends on testing students, and serve as a voice for parents who are upset about the assessment system. Both committees need to make periodic reports at least annually to the school board and to the media.

- Be proactive. Get in front of the AYP results before the assessment and testing data are released by encouraging parents to work with community leaders and citizens in discussing the kinds of resources and the quality of education necessary for a school to meet the AYP expectations. Conduct an audit and analyses of each school based on such indicators as past student assessments; socio-economics status; the levels of parental involvement; quality and competency of teachers; special student needs such as health and social service support, instructional interventions such as preschool programs, before and after school offerings, tutorials, and expanded school day and school year opportunities.
- Hold policy makers and elected officials accountable for providing the sufficient resources necessary to assure that schools are succeeding and making their AYP goals.

Resources

- Achieve, Inc
<http://www.aligntoachieve.org>
- Council of Chief State School Officers
<http://www.ccsso.org/>
- Education Commission of the States
<http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/search/default.asp>
- Education Trust
<http://66.43.154.40:8001/projects/edtrust/index.html>
- Eisenhower National Clearinghouse
<http://www.enc.org>
- FairTest
<http://www.fairtest.org/nattest/Kappan.pdf>
- National Center for Education Accountability Just For Kids
<http://www.just4kids.org/>
- National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing
<http://cresst96.cse.ucla.edu/index.htm>

Our Vision

Every day, in every community, *every* child
in America benefits from a quality public education.

Our Mission

To build public demand and mobilize resources for
quality public education for *all* children through a national
constituency of local education funds and individuals.



Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

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